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Heroic Ballads and the Biography of a Woman:  
On Coping with Conflicts in the Western Garhwal Himalaya  

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1. Introduction  

According to some prevalent views, life in traditional cultures and life in modern societies are distinguished by the fact that the former provide their members with prefabricated lifestyles and typological biographies, and thus with encompassing meaningful contexts, but that the latter do not fulfill these tasks for their members anymore, thus confronting them with the erosion and fragmentation of coherent structures, with isolation and forlorness (Taylor 1989). This conception of a near "paradise lost", however, has been relativized by others to some extent. Thus, Veena Das writes about female selfhood in modern India:  

"In the life histories of women caught between the obligations imposed by tradition and the promises of modernity which often fail – one produces oneself as a subject by the reflexive awareness of being subjugated to the tyranny of stories in which one owes little allegiance, but which become the public face that the person presents to the world. I cannot say whether this is the essence of femininity in societies such as India, as some have argued. There is evidence from the various genres of women's speech, such as laments, curses and songs of exile which would suggest that in the inner lives of women there was always a recognition of the burdens of a stable framework of life and a standard biography. There is also evidence that wars, famines and epidemics could suddenly alter the stable frames even before the advent of modernity in traditional societies."  

(Das 1994: 61)  

Although she rightly notes (Das 1994: 60) that individual lives are determined neither by tradition nor by modernity alone, she still attempts to polarize these differences. On the one hand, it is claimed (ibid.: 61) that women in modern India have their choice of an increasing array of alternative lifestyles and thus an increasing independence from "being subjugated to the tyranny of stories" although the realization of these new forms of freedom is, however, constantly being impeded by the continued existence
of inequality and violence against women. On the other hand, she states that traditional biographies could suddenly change because of "wars, famines and epidemics".

Consequently, it appears as if the lives of women in traditional societies are molded by sets of culturally determined behavioral norms and altered or threatened by occasional forces majeures only. Such attempts to rebuild Indian traditions do not provide satisfying explanations. They rest upon the idea that change and tradition contradict each other. Moreover, it has been pointed out elsewhere (Chandra 1992) that the very dichotomy of modernity vs. tradition is itself a culturally bound categorization originating in Europe and not valid per se in the Indian context.

Recently, an awareness has emerged that women in India have aspects of discourse that are, to a certain extent, distinct and dissociated from the (dominant) male ones (Raheja & Gold 1994). According to these authors, "... protest and tradition ... slide together, instead of being at odds with each other" (ibid.: 182).

The following account adumbrates the life story of a woman and her family from Bangan, a "traditional", male-dominated society of the western Garhwal Himalaya. The life story of this woman is also strongly marked by protest and tradition. Her protest, however — in contrast to feminist expectations — was directed against the non-compliance of her male relatives with her demands for a blood revenge. She attempted to mān garjo "restore the dignity" of her husband and son, who had been killed in an ambush.

In a certain sense, the life story of this woman has now lasted for more than two hundred years. In order to understand this, we will have to deal, among a number of other points, with questions of individuality and identity. It may be said that this long time period was "needed" in order to reintegrate the course of her alienated life into the larger cultural context. Since this context is, in fact, multi-layered, we will describe her biographical process of alienation and reintegration in three steps:

a. an initial series of traumas and confrontations,
b. then a period of limbo, and
c. finally, a series of negotiations that lead her back into society, although into a different context.

By the end of this paper we will see the transformations this woman undergoes in direct relation with a more general process of interaction between two distinct cultural spheres: the world of Himalayan warriors and the world of a regional theocracy.

2. Background

The name of the woman was Jotari. She lived more than two hundred years ago in Bangan, and she was the wife of a shepherd and hero, a so-called Khund. Before we can look at her biography in more detail, something more has to be said about Khunds and their peculiar way of life. Bangan is a peripheral region between the rivers Pabir and Tons near the border of Himachal Pradesh. Its inhabitants, who speak a form of the Indo-Aryan subgroup of West Pahari, are Hindus although, traditionally, they do not worship any of the well-known Hindu deities. Bangan forms part of the larger geographical area called Ravain (from Pabir and Tons in the west to the Yamuna in the east), which is still regarded by many as wild and unpleasant due to its many so-called demon gods (rākṣas devā) and its bygone martial culture and heroic traditions.

The main exponents of that bellicose spirit were the Khunds, a subgroup of the Rajputs.1 To be precise: Khunds were those members of Khund lineages who fought with enemies whenever the circumstances called for such action. A song from Bangan characterizes them thus:2

A Khund has his teeth in his stomach;3
a Khund steals sheep;
a Khund fights, and a Khund abducts women.

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1 According to Galey (1992: 181), the total population of Garhwal can be divided into 60 % Rajputs, 20 % Brahmans, and 20 % service groups.
2 In the secondary literature, Khunds have hardly been taken notice of. Hendriksen gives the following succinct description (1976: 35): "man who in former times would kill a prominent man in another (probably hostile) village, cut off his head and bring it back to his village' (the head would be carried in procession through the village and buried and a stone pyramid would be erected over it; afterwards it would be object of worship'). Besides Hands, who briefly mentions them (1985: 54, 60, 112), cf. also Zoller 1993 and Zoller (in press).
3 This expression describes a man who behaves in an especially low-keyed and obliging manner.
The rugged character of the landscape, which is so dominant between Pobar and Tons, does not permit extensive agriculture. But one can see that stretches of land, described in old songs as pastures, meanwhile have turned into farmland and that the economy of the Khunds is now based mainly on agriculture rather than on pastoralism. Yet, the three lines of the song have not altogether lost their relevance: There are still occasional fights over grazing grounds, there are various festivals where fights and brawls are rather the rule than the exception (Lalit 1993), and I personally met women who had been abducted when they were young. And those few men who are presently acknowledged as real Khunds still seem to me to "have their teeth in their stomach".

Khund families can now be found everywhere in the region and they do not distinguish themselves from the rest of the population in a noticeable way. But it seems that this was not always the case. Oral poetry indicates an especially close relation between the Khunds and sheep farming. Sheep farming is related to high altitude and alpine pastures. This tallies with two more statements which I have heard from many mouths: In former times the Khunds lived only in villages at high altitudes in the interior of the region, and they drank water only from springs (mul "root") but not from rivers or brooks. Their dislike for river water persists to this day. Some people say that Khunds can be made out by their physiological appearance, but I am unable to confirm this. However, there was one feature of their dress which distinguished Khund warriors from all the other people. They wore a sort of sash (tagri) around the belly with which they fixed their battle-axes (dahgr). Now it is said that such a sash was, in fact, a shroud. Certainly the shroud was not worn as a sort of "emergency equipment" but in order to symbolize the warrior’s intimate relation with combat and death.

Jotari was not abducted as a young woman, but her husband, the Khund Dalu, abducted another important person, as we will see below. And Dalu went in for head-hunting. This fierce practice, as well as other forms of violence, should not be understood as uncultured and coarsened customs but has to be seen in terms of the wider cultural context of the region. All of these forcible acts are perceived as the simultaneous conquest of material valuables and of a spiritual energy. The energy, called mir, is a power innate in the earth. It originates from village sanctuaries called jaga. The word simultaneously refers to the physical construction of the sanctuary and a female numinous being. Such jagas (lit., "places") are found in most of the Bangani villages and they are sometimes said to be the daughters of the earth. They consist of four stone walls, about four to five meters long and one to three meters high, arranged in the shape of a square. The four tops of the walls are covered with wood beams. Thus the whole construction has a parallelepiped form. The interior is filled with earth, upon which grass and weeds grow. In the middle is a hole, said to be her mouth, about half a meter deep and covered by an erect stone. In the past, the heads of slain hostile warriors were placed in the hole.

The spiritual aspect of the jaga is twofold: she can be experienced as a driving and stimulating force, and she is occasionally seen by the locals in the form of a hill woman. Additionally, the effect of the power (mir) of the jaga is also twofold: the mir causes the growth of all plants, animals and humans of a village and its surroundings; moreover, it formerly used to charge up the Khunds before a fight and stir them into a frenzy. Though all living beings of a village are suffused with a specific mir-energy, the energy is especially condensed and concentrated in a "life center" in the necks of men. Thus, to decapitate a hostile warrior and place his head in the mouth of one’s own jaga both led to an increase in her power, and, moreover, increased the esteem for the village.

The mightiness of a jaga is reflected in the number of sacrificial animals she receives after varying intervals. There may be three, five, six, nine, or twelve animals, and the more powerful jagas are said to have also received human victims in former times. These jagas are, as a rule, sanctuaries for one village only, but the jagas receiving twelve sacrificial victims are connected with several villages. There is, however, only one jaga in Bangani of this type. She is located at an altitude of more than 2,500 meters in a place called Jajrari, and the length and height of her walls are roughly twice those of the village jagas.4 Jotari had, as we will later see, a close relation with this most powerful of all the jagas of Bangani. One of the five villages with whom this jaga is said to be connected is Saras, the village into which Jotari had married (see Map).

4 Besides this powerful jaga of Jajrari, there are two more equally powerful jagas of the "twelve-sacrifice" type. One is located in the village Thanggar in the Deogar District southwest of Bangani, and the other in the village Kharar in Himachal Pradesh northwest of Bangani. It is striking that all these three powerful jagas are located at high altitudes above 2,500 meters.
The jāgas are a sort of "tutelary spirits" pertaining to Rajput lineages and their villages. They embody a similar type of power that Galey attempts to characterize with the notions of "chieftdom" or "chieftainship" (Galey 1992: 193). A typical representative of chieftainship is the village elder (sāyānd), who is the oldest representative of a local lineage (ibid.: 188f.). Galey associates the notion with concepts like "local origin" (ibid.: 196), "kinship ties" (ibid.: 193), "clan cult", "witchcraft" and "feuds" (ibid.: 196). and he places chieftdom and chieftainship in opposition to the notion of "lordship". The latter's typical representatives are the village headman (pradīhana) (ibid.: 188f.), local gods (ibid.: 201), and, finally, the king. Lordship thus has a "vertical" alignment, encompassing the whole caste hierarchy. It is associated with a hiearchized pantheon (ibid.: 198), with a multiplicity of official functions, and with the delegation of powers and responsibilities. Since "lords are entitled to render justice" (ibid.: 202), it follows that local gods can administer justice. This is, in fact, still a common practice.

Galey stresses that the two types of power do not suggest a dualistic society (Galey 1992: 200). Rather he attempts to show how exponents of chieftainship, for instance, powerful clan divinities, are transformed into "lordship authorities" and thus integrated into more extensive politico-religious systems. Although he denies that the former kingdom of Tehri Garhwal was organized in terms of a generally accepted hierarchy with the king as the sole center, he nevertheless assumes that all "subtotalities like that of a village, a clan, a House, or a locality ... contain the multidimensional relationships of a common order" (ibid.: 205). His model certainly holds true for many cases. However, there also seem to exist areas where the two principles of power are less related by processes of integration, based on a common order, than by positions of contrast and incongruity. I want to suggest here (1) that the jāgas and the Khūnds are representatives of chieftainship, and the dominant gods of Bhang and their functionaries, of lordship (however not exactly in Galey's sense, as we will see); that chieftainship and lordship in Bhang basically constitute two different spheres of life (involving different lifestyles, different attitudes towards hierarchy and divine authority, etc.) without a common order. These spheres, nevertheless,

5 In Bhang and probably many other parts of the Central Himalaya, lineage and village are (or rather were) often equivalent. Cf. Krengel 1988: 57.
6 Cf. also Galey 1990: 155ff.
coexist, and are interconnected or even interlocked in manifold ways. This coexistence probably involved a slow historical shift from a former dominance of chiefdom to the present dominance of lordship. The oral poetry introduced below, however, describes some incidents where this coexistence and mutual dependence was seriously disturbed. This, in turn, gives us the opportunity for a better understanding of the main features of the two spheres. As a consequence, I will suggest (2) that, in fact, it was the presence of these two spheres which allowed Jotari to undertake action after her husband and son had been killed. The "price" of her actions was a dramatic transformation of her personality from the wife of an outstanding hero into a divine attendant of a powerful god.

There are, to my knowledge, no indigenous terms corresponding with the two categories of chiefdom and lordship. It is, however, significant that I was frequently told that jagas are not goddesses. We have seen that they are associated with lineages, that they are the manifestations of local earth powers, and that they are the guarantors for the perpetuation of feuds. A Bangani recently told me spontaneously that "jaga has no fixed mali (shaman)". He wanted to say that the jagas, unlike the local gods, do not have officially designated mouthpieces. They do, in fact, not have any office bearers of their own.

The local gods of Bangan as representatives of lordship present a completely different picture. Most dominant among them is Mahāṣu, in fact a generic term designating four brothers who rule over a vast stretch of land extending approximately from the valley of Sutlej to that of Yamunā. The main center of their cult is the village Haroli at the bank of the Tons River, where the eldest brother, Botha Mahāṣu, resides. The names of the three other brothers are Pavs, Bāṣik, and Cāṣć Mahāṣu. As a divine king, Mahāṣu rules over all minor deities (guardian deities, called brī). He keeps the fairies and demons of his dominion in check. However, he is not master of the jagas; he has no control over them. Mahāṣu and the jagas are certainly not enemies, but "family rows" do occur. I have heard of several cases where functionaries of Mahāṣu were suddenly attacked by the energy of a jagas. One case happened only in 1994 when in the course of the worship of a jagas an officiating shaman (mali) was overpowered by the jagas's energy and thrown to the ground. Besides Mahāṣu's inability to control the jagas, it is also remarkable that there are almost no shrines to the goddess in the whole of Bangan. Thus, Mahāṣu's control of his kingdom also displays martial traits in which there is no place for female guardian deities. Beside his actual presence in busts, Mahāṣu is represented in the form of swords (koṭari) and beautifully ornamented drum-shaped metal containers (doria). Mahāṣu has a large number of office bearers: Brahmans priests with their Rajput assistants, treasurers, shamans, bards and devadāsīs. He has also two Rajput viziers who are the superiors of all the other office bearers, being entitled to administer justice in his name in the core area of his dominion, to the right of the Tons River (this area is called pāṣi bil) and to its left (this area is called šati bil). In a way, the kingdom of Mahāṣu continues the former dominion of the Paṇḍavas and Kauravas. The Pandavas are said to have ruled over the šati bil and the Kauravas over the pāṣi bil before the advent of Mahāṣu. Besides acting for the royal deity Mahāṣu, his viziers also represented the king of Tehri Garhwal. I was told that he gave them the power to administer justice and even put people into prison. This "double-bind" contrasts with the widespread myths describing the advent of Mahāṣu. They say that when Mahāṣu arrived from Kaśmir in the Tons Valley, he strangled the local vizier and installed his own man. We will return to this point below.

Despite some phonetic problems, there seems to exist a cognate of the word Khūnd in the Khashali dialect of Himachal Prades as "khūd", "master" in the compound, "kula khūd", "master of the family" (which

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7 According to some, however, he is the second-oldest brother. The noticeable preference for disagreement even on basic "tenets" and the fact that the four Mahāṣu brothers share power in an intricate way is perhaps also an expression of the principle of the "many centers".

8 Besides a small shrine in the Mainjani village, which is said to be of recent origin, there is another small shrine near the Pedasa village at the southern border of Bangan dedicated to a "cruel goddess" named thanpati ("lord of the place"; obviously similar in meaning to jaga). There are also small shrines dedicated to Kāli attached to a few major temples of Mahāṣu. This Kāli, however, has nothing to do with the well-known Kāli. The appellation is not much more than another name for jaga (Lalit 1993: 79).

9 Galey says (1992: 216): "It is also interesting to note that in Garhwal, the emblem of royal power is not the traditional stick (dandga) ... but rather the sword (talvār)." The sword of Mahāṣu is, however, not only understood as an emblem but also as a place where he is present.
means a "family deity" or kul devatā), mentioned by Varma (1965: 161). The author thinks that "[the substitution of this alien name kh 'qd for 'devatā' is obscure, but thought-provoking" (ibid.). This obscurity, however, disappears when we interpret the Khunds as "masters" and "lords" parallel to the local gods, who have been described above as lords as well. Mahāṣā is addressed as "lord" (thakur), and from his point of view all people in the dominion are his (or his viziers') subjects (prajā). But Khunds are also thakurs.11 Although, in the meantime, they tend to understand themselves also as subjects of Mahāṣā, oral poetry indicates that they had a different self-image in the past when the gods were not their superiors but, at the most, on par with them.

The relations between male god and vizier on the one side, and female jaga and Khund on the other appear to be quite similar. Neither is the vizier subject of Mahāṣā nor is a Khund a subordinate of his jaga. A vizier is the god when touring his dominion and when making legal decisions, and a Khund (indicating a "family-deity" in some parts of Himachal Pradesh) realizes the power of his jaga in fights. We have seen that the jagas arouse a battle intoxication in their heroes and that they "act" through them during their fights. As emanations of particular localities, jagas are, on the one hand, highly individualized12 and thus contrast with the gods, who can be present simultaneously in a number of places.13 On the other hand, since they are (almost) lacking in any form of history, of myths or other stories, they are perceived by the locals as anonymous beings — again in sharp contrast to the perception of the local gods. As a consequence, one cannot pray to jagas; one can only call upon them to arise within oneself. If the Khunds of the village Sarās wanted to set out for a fight, they first would have gone to their jaga with the words śuri jaga meri sūrāse ri ("Oh you my valiant jaga of Sarās").

I was told that "in front of Mahāṣā the Khunds and the viziers are equal". This statement makes sense only when we accept the existence of the two spheres. Then we also can rephrase the sentence and say: Mahāṣā and jaga, and Khund and vizier are equal. Mahāṣā does not control the jagas and his viziers could not give orders to the Khunds, but Khunds cooperated with the viziers, giving them protection and punishing malefactors. Their actions were thus equally influenced by the old networks of family feuds with the jagas as their "junctions", and by their solidarity with Mahāṣā. It is probably not too far-fetched to understand the existence of the two spheres also in the light of the old division of the country into two halves, once ruled by the Kauravas and the Pandavas (the division still continues in the institution of the two viziers of Mahāṣā and reappears in a number of areas in eastern Himachal Pradesh) and of various agonistic festivals in which groups have a tendency to organize themselves in moieties (Nanda 1993: 50; Lalit 1993: 68, 69; Zoller 1993). Thus, there were (and partly are) simultaneously bipolar shapings of various sizes using different codes, shapings which intersect, overlap, form backgrounds or foregrounds, etc., and whose "common order", if there is one at all, is much better characterized "negatively" with "difference, polarization, opposition" and "lack of center" or "plurality of centers". They were probably not always very stable, and one finds traces of recurring upheavals and restructurings. Apart from that it is quite clear that such structures differ radically from center-oriented political-religious formations like the kingdom of Tehri Garhwal, which emphasized integration and generally accepted hierarchy. Thus, at the juncture when the king of Tehri made himself felt in the area, when he managed to make the legitimacy of the viziers of Mahāṣā also dependent on him, the former dynamic balance must have been disturbed quite seriously. It lead to a unilateral increase of the status of the two viziers. In the words of a Bangani: "Traditionally, a Khund was higher than the vizier, but politically the vizier got some special rights which, however, never bothered the Khunds." Thus, we may clarify our above statement regarding the equal ranking of Khund and vizier, and say that each one was also higher than the other, one in terms of political authority and the other in terms of "vital" energy. In time, however, political authority gained in importance to the disadvantage of the status and influence of the Khunds.

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10 Varma derives the word from Persian əxwînd, "husband; master, lord".
11 Care should be taken here not to confuse the indigenous term with Galey's theoretical terms.
12 The striking love for the soil is described in detail in Zoller (in press).
13 A more detailed analysis would have differentiated the positions of the gods in the various hierarchies. Some lower-ranking gods are worshiped in one place only; on the other hand, the Hindu gods of Garhwal are worshiped in countless places. A god like Mahāṣā, however, takes an intermediate position in the sense that he has only one place where he is actually present but a number of other places (in the form of temples, shrines, and the above-mentioned swords and metal containers) where he somehow exists in the form of a "reduced presence".
3. History and the Texts

The heroic life of the Khünd Dalu Ḡairāq, his wife Ḡairāq, and their son Jītu is beyond doubt a historical reality. I estimate that they lived in the second half of the eighteenth century. Their small village, Sarās, lies in the interior of Bangan at an altitude of around 2,500 meters. It is said that the father of Dalu came from some unknown place and settled in Sarās. In the beginning, he lived with his family and his sheep under a huge cedar tree (devadāru). Whenever they took a rest in the shadow beneath the tree's mighty branches and cooked their food, after the meal, it would turn out that a large amount of food was left over. Clearly, the place was powerful. As one villager put it: "Under that tree, they experienced a lot of pleasure, and also, the sheep and goats thrived." Dalu's father felled that tree and there constructed his house, which still exists.

The accounts of the songs, however, begin at a much later point, as we will see. I know of songs in two different lyrical forms. They are called puara and chāra. Puaras are ballads, where the singers alternate between sung verses and prose passages, spoken in a highly dramatic voice. They are performed by low-caste bards, usually in January and February, to entertain their Rajput "masters" and to arouse their sense of pride. The puara in question is called Jitu Ḡairāq because it is Jitu who is regarded as the greatest hero of Bangan - although he never killed an enemy! Instead, he was treacherously killed when still very young. But, as some people say, had he not been killed in his youth, he would have become an even greater hero than his father, Dalu (who himself was no slouch). Now follows a brief summary of this ballad:

Dalu goes to Sarās to visit one of the two viziers of Mahāsu in order to bring him some obligatory gifts. The vizier lives at the bank of the Tons River in the village Banīhuari, and his name is Baguan. He gets Dalu completely drunk and urges him to kill somebody from the Khünd family of Nag Dev Phandata, which lives in Shiktur, an area to the northeast and east of Bangan. When, one day, the mir stirs in Dalu, he sets out, decapitates a son and a nephew of Nag Dev Phandata, and brings their heads first to the jaga of Ḡairāq and then to his own village, Sarās, where he plays soccer with the heads. However, the same vizier who had put him up to this deed now betrays him. Thereafter, Nag Dev Phandata arrives with his men in the village Balca, where nine men from Sarās are coincidentally staying. The Phandata men wangle their battle-axes out of them, then kill them all; and again, one plays soccer with the heads. But Dalu is still alive. Now, as spring starts, his son Jitu is expected to go with the sheep to the pastures. Notwithstanding several bad omens, Jitu brings his sheep to the pasture of Deike. In the meantime, Dalu goes to Bidi Goican, the second vizier of Mahāsu. The people of the area had asked him to go because the vizier was continually oppressing and exploiting them. Dalu kidnaps the malefactor, but, later on, surprisingly spares his life. Rama, the son of Bidi Goican, now brings Nag Dev Phandata with his men to the pasture of Deike, where Dalu has also arrived. Jitu and Dalu are ambushed; a battle-axe crushes the spine of Jitu, and his father is killed a few meters away. End of the puara.

Even this brief summary enables us to discern two types of conflict related to the two forms of power:

a. a vendetta following the traditions of the Khünds, and
b. a confrontation between a Khünd and a vizier.

The ballad now draws two clearly distinct images of the Khünds and the viziers: Dalu's nature is "smashing and crushing of [others'] powers", he is "addicted to fighting", Phandata "never restrains himself and doesn't care what others say". The vizier, on the other hand, is "the grandson of a powerful master" (namely the king of Tehri), but he is also "powerful among the nobles". However, the fact that the power of the Khünd and the authority of the vizier are indeed rooted in two different politico-religious spheres is indirectly emphasized in the ballad in the form of various epithets and refrains. The vizier is "the umbrella of the ten times hundred" (that is, he is like] a deity or king ["umbrella"] for countless people), but when mentioned together with a Khünd, then he is a "weakling" whereas the Khünd is
a "strangler" and "proud". When Dalu's wife sees the kidnapped vizier from a distance, she first thinks he is a washout, but then she is very upset when she realizes what a high dignitary her husband has captured.

The second type of song is called chaora. Choras are loose collections of sometimes bucolic and sometimes sad and melancholy quatrains in alternate rhyme. They are sung by Rajput men and women as responsories. They express emotional states rather than tell whole stories from beginning to end. Therefore, they are very elliptic, full of allusions, and thus extremely difficult to understand for outsiders. Their very moving nature was made clear to me in spring 1995 when I was working with my local assistant on the translation of some quatrains that describe the death of Jitu. On two occasions, we had to discuss them with the old mother of my assistant, and each time she heard the lines, she burst into tears. Here is a short summary of the events connected with Dalu and Jitu:

Dalu asks Jitu to find out from a priest what day would be auspicious for setting out with the sheep. But Jitu says no day is auspicious - only bad omens turn up. These omens are also noted by Jotar. Both Jotar and Jitu think it better to stay with the sheep near the village, but Dalu is determined to have them brought down to Deike. Father and son arrive in Deike, hear a threatening voice, and fear an imminent sheep raid.

Now, there is a sudden change of perspective, and Jotar witnesses, to her great surprise, the return of the sheepdog, named Simra. Here are some lines:

"Oh my dear dog Simra,
why do you lick my feet?
Either Jitu is worried in his heart,
or one has, oh my God, killed Jitu and Dalu."

The dog then places the silver bracelets of the two men before Jotar's feet, and her doubts turn into cruel certainty:

"Oh my dear dog Simra,
I'll always care for you.
I've seen the bracelet of my son, your brother."
Oh God, Jotar went mad.

The chorás say nothing about the background of the deed or how it was carried out. The remaining 20 or 25 quatrains are now exclusively devoted to the description of how the bereaved Jotar takes revenge. This change of perspective from the fate of the heroes to that of Jotar also marks a significant change in the course of the story. And it marks the beginning of a series of transformations undergone by Jotar, which only recently has found a (temporary) end. This process makes Jotar abandon her ties with the heroic world, and it gradually associates her with the hierarchy of the local gods. This finally results in her deification.

4. Jotar's Despair and Bravery

My two Bangari assistants and I reached Saras for the first time on a chilly afternoon in March 1995. We stayed in the house of Shankar Singh Jinuekte and his wife Candi. Both were kind enough to tell us a great deal about the Jorians and the many ways in which they are involved with them. Candi's birthplace is the village of Jotar in Bangan, the same village that Jotar hailed from. The name Jotar itself is a derivation from Jotia, the family name of her parents. From Jotia also derive the names of the villages Jotar in Bangan and Jhatwar in Himachal Pradesh. Jhatwar formerly belonged to the kingdom of Bushahar. It is said to be the "original" village of the ancestors of Jotar.

Shankar Singh and Candi now told us the following: Around 20 years ago, after the birth of their first son, Candi suddenly became possessed. The possession attacks continued for five years, but the cause of the attacks could not be found out. Sometimes the voice claimed to be a fairy, sometimes the

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17 The difficulties are increased by an exceedingly drawn-out way of singing and by hiatuses prescribed in certain positions, which may distort words beyond recognition. Moreover, the quatrains usually have a dialectic structure, but it is never said who is talking to or with whom.

18 The chorás related to the Jorians number between 40 and 50. Normally, however, they are hardly ever all sung at one time. Both of my recordings, which I made in the springs of 1994 and 1995 with two different singers, are therefore not typical because I had requested them to sing all of the Jorian-related chorás they knew. The two collections, however, outline the events quite similarly.

19 This phrase ends, as we have seen, with the death of father and son.

20 Presently, there are three lineages in Saras: the Jorians, the Jinuekte and the Dekutrake.
Then, finally, she revealed herself as the pāp of Jotari with the following words: "I am Jotari; my son was Jitu; I was pregnant in the fifth month."

This unusually long process of clarification perhaps has something to do with the unexpectedness of her identity. The word pāp refers, much like the word jaga, to two different phenomena: it means both a spiritual power and small shrines. A pāp is said to usually come into existence during the weeks and months after the death of a person if the person had been ill-treated by his/her family members or if some other sort of family discord had not been settled before the person’s demise. The pāp of the dead then speaks through a family member (often a child) and requests to be worshipped. Consequently, a small shrine is built, and the pāp is pacified — i.e., is brought beyond the horizon of the living — through sacrifices every year or every couple of years. The process of pacification often lasts for decades, and there seem to be very few families in the area without a pāp affiliation. Pāps are represented in various forms: as wooden figures in small huts, as slats with a triangular aperture in the middle, or as small wooden triangles. The weaker pāps are placed somewhere outside in the fields; the most powerful ones have their place right in the kitchens. A pāp is not the soul of the dead person (which has moved to the kingdom of the dead) but is rather something like an “unprocessed remnant”. I do not think it can be said to what degree a pāp resembles the former person — certainly only in a limited way, yet it seems to preserve something of the personality of the dead.

The account of the Jinauikes was interrupted time and again. She was engaged in preparing a delicious dish for us, while he, unfortunately without success, was trying to round that off with the shooting of some wild fowl. When we asked them why the pāp of Jotari had come into existence, and this after the amazing period of 200 years, they recounted the following. After the death of her husband and son, the pregnant Jotari went to Jotari to her paternal house and asked her family members to avenge the gruesome deed. They, however, rejected her appeal simply out of fear of being killed themselves. Jotari, humiliated and desperate, shouted that she would never return to Jotari. Moreover, she pronounced a curse on them, saying that no more marriages would be possible between Jotari and Saras. And she announced that after her death, her “negative feelings” would transform into a power, called dōs, which would punish those who dared to ignore her ban.

This episode is not mentioned in the ēhoras. There, however, it is said in a quatrain that the disaster entirely failed to move Dalu’s relatives:

They sit, o brother, on the wall of the threshing floor
as if they had had their lunch.

The scene in Jotari is of crucial importance because the relatives’ refusal to take revenge forces Jotari to turn to the vizier of Mahāsu (a lord) for help. We can here differentiate three mutually incompatible perspectives on social relations:

a. Perspective of Dalu (a chief): he accepts the presence of the lordship, but is not willing to submit. When a Brahman says in the puara that there is no auspicious day to set out with the sheep, he retorts in the following way: “The Brahman should look after his own karma. Let the sheep move out!” And in condemning the oppressive practices of the viziers, he says: “I’m the guru of the poor — I give them grain and money.” He calls the Vizier Bidi Goićan a chicken, a weirdo, whom he is going to kill, and he challenges the god Pokhu with the question as to whether he is with or against him during his head-hunting expedition. And when Jotari hides the vizier in Saras after his abduction, Dalu orders the sword of Mahāsu to be sent from Hanöl to Saras, thus forcing the god to bring his own vizier back to Hanöl.

b. Perspective of the viziers (lords): the Vizier Banguan tries to play off one Khūnd cian against the other and thus weaken the power of the Khūnds. When the bodyguards of Bidi Goićan see Dalu come near, the vizier tells them: “He is my Khūnd — he hasn’t got it in for me.” In this way he tries to treat Dalu as an inferior and vassal.

c. Perspective of Jotari (the relative): she continually stresses that there are family-like connections between the Jotians and the viziers, and she seolds Dalu when he arrives with the abducted Bidi Goićan, whom she then treats like a respected family member.

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21 The word comes from Sanskrit pāpa, "evil, sin".
22 The Bangani term for "to avenge" is mān gare "to restore the honor".
23 Dōs is the name of an afflicting power, typically sent by divine beings as a punishment for the violation of certain laws, bans or taboos.
The events, which begin with the abduction of Bidi Goličan and end with the final revenge, are permeated with tender irony. The irony is based on the incongruity among the three perspectives of chief, lord and relative. While recording the puera, I noticed that Dalu’s decision not to kill Bidi Goličan (because he was no serious enemy) evoked laughter among the listeners. Or take Jotari’s and Dalu’s relatives, who turn out to be cowards. Or the famous and powerful juga of Jajūri: in one quatrain, it is said that its mighty logs have been broken into pieces. And it is especially ironic that the pacifying behavior that Jotari so much stresses also offers her the possibility, later on, of getting the revenge carried out.

The choras and our hosts in Sarās agree that Jotari lost her mind from one moment to the next when her family ceased to exist. She goes now to the Vizier Baṅguan in the village of Baṅkhuari. He addresses her as sister and married daughter of the lineage (see below), and she calls him maternal uncle, brother and blood relation—and requests that he take revenge. He agrees but, according to the choras, demands a sack filled with silver coins. Thus, ironically, he simultaneously reveals and negates his “real” identity as a lord, who should collect taxes and not heads.

The course of events from here on is described differently by the Jinhaukes and in the choras. The former said that the vizier is immediately ready to help her. He tells her, however, to also ask the god Bith Mahāsū in Hanol for help. When she does so, Mahāsū “sends” her his divine vizier, the god of the sheep, Sherkuria. In the very same moment, Jotari “remembers” her “original village” of Jhauari in the kingdom of Bushahar. She goes to the king, whom she also addresses as a blood relation, and asks him for help. The king sends his soldiers, who, filled with the power of the god Sherkuria, attack the enemies in Shiktür and defeat them.

The quasi-kin relations emphasized by Jotari and the viziers in this account have to be seen together within the context of Galey’s following observations (Galey 1992: 203): “Local lordships consider dominant lineages as affines and address them as if they were their maternals.” And (ibid.: 204): “...lords consider the lineages and chiefs to whom they relate less as dependent in terms of power as inferior in terms of wife-givers.” In Baṅguan, however, we have just the opposite situation: the lords are addressed in the same manner as wife-givers. This has the important implication that a married woman can expect the same help and concern from vizier, king and god as she normally does from her maternals. Majumdar refers to this when he says the following (Majumdar 1963: 75): “... a dhyanti [married daughter of the lineage] is always a concern of her father or brothers, whenever she may like to come and stay at home.” Therefore, when Jotari gets no support from the members of her parents’ home, she condemns them to losing their function as wife-givers for the lineages in Sarās. Then, she, logically, turns to the quasi-wife-givers, and in succession, she goes to a human vizier, to a divine king, to a divine vizier, and finally to a human king. It is fascinating to follow the range of her movement: from the human lord to Mahāsū, a royal god with a great dominion; from Mahāsū to Sherkuria, who represents a point of contact between two dominions, for he is a vizier at the royal court of Mahāsū in Hanol, and he is a god of the sheep who is associated with the Khūnds and who is widely worshipped in the area of the erstwhile kingdom of Bushahar. It is in his presence that Jotari “remembers” Jhauari, her “original village”. Her journey to the king is thus simultaneously a transforming movement, which reconnects her with the origins of her family.

The choras give another version of the course of revenge. Sherkuria is not mentioned at all, and the king of Bushahar is only alluded to. Instead, the Vizier Baṅguan tells a man of his clan, whose name is Bādār Singh, to conduct the revenge. Bādār Singh goes to village Gundiate in Shiktür, sets fire to the village, kills two of its inhabitants and, ironically, also Rama, the son of the Vizier Bidi Goličan. The limit is when Bādār Singh, a member of the vizier’s family, even has to be prevented from destroying the temple of the village! He appears as if temporarily transformed into a Khund. Nonetheless, these actions served to restore the honor of Jotari and her family:

O Baṅguan,24 don’t burn down the temple in the middle, for all [people] this is the seat of the gods!
O Bādār Singh, son of Lala,
your dear man, you have restored the honor of Jiu and Dalu.

The attempts to kill the sons of enemies were perhaps made in order to erase hostile lineages. But Jotari was pregnant in the fifth month. Most significantly, she named her second son Miru. Gyan Singh Chauhan, the expert on genealogies in Bindri, spontaneously explained the meaning of Miru as “he

24 Significantly, Bādār Singh is addressed here with his lineage name.
who is full with mūr". It seems as if Jojari tried to make it utterly clear that the lineage of the Jorians would continue. And, indeed, so it did. Miru had two sons, and the descendants of one of them multiplied into what are presently 21 families. Of these families, three have the traditional right to live in the old house in Sarās that was constructed by Dalu's father at the place where the old cedar tree stood. As a memento of Sherkūra's help, a male goat was always kept chained to the house. But when my companions and I wanted to pay the house a respectful visit, we were surprised to discover that the building was deserted and the iron chain for the goat hung down forsaken.

5. The Burden of a Heroic Tradition on the Shoulders of a Woman Farmer

The ban on marriages between the two villages was strictly adhered to by the Jorians and Jojars but not always by the other lineages. In the latter cases, Jojari's curse turned out to be effective. We were told several case histories with the typical symptoms of dōsā affliction: diseases and accidents among humans and cattle (although it seems that women were the special target of her wrath). In one case, the eyes of a young woman from Jojari were so badly affected that she had to leave Sarās and marry a second time in another village.

Candi, too, ignored the ban. Why then was she not likewise afflicted by the dōs of Jojari? My guess is that her prolonged crisis of five years was needed for the restructuring of "Jojari's" identity at a critical moment. This restructuring was probably a necessary consequence of a polarization between those lineages in Sarās that were no longer willing to accept the ban on marriages and the Jorians, who were and are strictly against the relaxation. Shankar Singh emphasized that the pāp of Jojari now would not object anymore to marriages between the two villages.

Two hundred years ago, Jojari could not have her vengeful feelings satisfied in the way she had expected. Her own family was demolished, and her blood relatives and in-laws refused to help her. The breaking of ties between a married woman and her parental home is not uncommon in the area, and it regularly leads to the emergence of dōs (Joshi in press). In Jaunsār, an area adjoining Bangan, this (as well as other forms of conflict) leads to "an institutionalized form of suspended conflict" which "keeps disputing families and sometimes even groups in a state of truce" (ibid.), called cehinga, which is the "sacred counterpart" of "profane" conflicts (Joshi 1994: 59). Thus, in western Gharwal, severe conflicts can be transferred from a human level to the level of the gods. The latter then decide when (i.e., after how many generations) the conflict should be settled. Premature arbitrations by people lead to new dōs affections (Joshi 1994: 59, 61).

Candi became the focus of the attempt to bring such a sacred conflict to an end. In this case, however, the attempt was evaluated as premature not by the deity involved but by one of the affected parties, the Jorians. To escape the deadlock of the above-mentioned polarization, an ingenious solution was designed: the declaration of Candi's affliction not as the dōs but as the pāp of Jojari. Pāp (Sanakrit "evil", "sin") and dōs (Sanakrit "fault", "vice"; "damage", "bad consequence") are conceptually closely related in Gharwal, but they are not the same. Both are effective energies, but only the former has a "personal" aspect as well. Dōs can be averted or diverted (e.g., by Brahman rituals), but with a pāp one can argue and negotiate. This goal was achieved by declaring the "curse energy" of Jojari to be pāp. However, the ritual worship of a pāp normally leads, as we have seen, to a slow removal of the "spiritual remains" of the dead person beyond the horizon of the living. This did not happen to Jojari.

6. Metamorphoses

When Candi's affliction was identified as the pāp of Jojari, a silver figure was made by the Jiqualeks, which was kept in the old house of the Jorians. The latter, however, refused to worship her. Instead, the offerings were made by Shankar Singh twice a year: rice and ghee in January/February and a type of flat bread in July/August. Then, after three years, the doria, i.e., the drum-shaped metal container representing (Bohta) Mahāsū, passed through Sarās. He (that is, his mouthpiece) said the following to "her": "If the Jorians do not want to have you, then you can come to my temple in Hanūl and have your seat directly beside me. There, you can 'consume' together with me the worship performed for me." Mahāsū's offer, I believe, saved "Jojari" from the fate of the other pāps. But before this could be achieved, "Jojari" had to pass through several stations.

Around the same time, or a little earlier, a young woman from Sarās was hit by Jojari's dōs. When the cause was identified, the pāp (of) Jojari was
requested to leave the woman alone. "She" agreed upon the condition that the grandfather of the husband of the afflicted woman get two golden eyes for the silver figure. Additionally, "she" wanted a godān to be conducted, i.e., the presentation of a cow to a Brahman in Sarās. Both demands were accepted (and they probably also served to prove the existence of the pāp). But before the eyes could be attached, the figure had to be brought to Hardwār at the Ganges, where it was ritually bathed. Then the silver figure was brought to "her" maternal village Jatari, where "she" was worshipped for some time by priests.

The attaching of eyes on the silver figure and worship by Brahmins remind one of the consecration of a deity, whereas the bathing in Hardwār together with the giving away of a cow are allusions to the last rites for the dead. It seems that only such a two-pronged movement of "cremation" and "deification" could overcome that unbearable "state of truce".

The last step in this transformational process was completed when Candi, with her husband and the figure, arrived at the temple of Hanōl. According to their account, the priests then performed a religious ceremony (pūjā), and Candi had to inhale incense, after which she became possessed. Then, Botha Mahāsū said (through his mouthpiece): "All right, I relieve you of the pāp, but you have to make bār [bribery] for me." By "bribery" the god meant compensation for his taking over the pāp and keeping "her" in his temple: the couple had to perform devotions twice a year in the same way and at the same time as they had earlier been performed by Shankar Singh in the house of the Joriants. These rites are still faithfully carried out by the two. They are dedicated to the silver figure, Jotari, and to Shekuriya, the divine vizier and god of the sheep. Every time, they said, Candi becomes possessed. Regular possession and worship of the two figures bribe Mahāsū because they establish an "artificial" congruence between Jotari as pāp (which is associated with death and decay) and Jotari as a sort of goddess.

7. More of Dōś and the Decline of a World

How disappointing it was for us when we found out that the Joriants had deserted the foundation house of their lineage! What had happened? The first explanation that we heard was this: three families of the Joriants used to live in the old house. But then, in each family, a "bad feeling" came into being because each family thought that it alone should occupy the house. As a result, a dōś emerged, so afflicting the three families that all of them had to leave the place.26 None of the three families dares to return, for fear that the other families would go to Mahāsū, tell him that they had the same right to reside there, and thus force the god to send a dōś against the occupant.

A little later, more explanations followed. Shankar Singh said that a long time ago, some men of the Joriants had been viziers of a not-too-important god named Kāj.27 One day, perhaps because of the migration of the Joriants into Banag, Botha Mahāsū started to put the viziers under pressure and persuade them to give up their office and become his treasurers instead. But then, Pavanis Mahāsū angrily intervened, stating that Sarās was located in the area ruled by him. Thus, behind the family argument stood a quarrel among the three gods. Since the gods did not want to disclose their conflict in public, they channeled their "bad feelings" into the dōś against the house of the Joriants.

We have already found a number of ruptures and contradictions in the saga of the Joriants. But when I heard this last part of Shankar Singh's account, I became really upset, interrupted him, and exclaimed: "But a Khind can never be a vizier!" The answer of all people present was equally spontaneous: "Yes, you are right!" Nevertheless, it was also confirmed that one of the Joriants is presently treasurer in Hanōl in the temple of Botha Mahāsū.

The old differences between the spheres of the chief's and the lords seem to have almost disappeared now. How pronounced it really was is difficult to judge. But the fact that lordship has gained ground is undeniable. When we arrived in Sarās that chilly afternoon, I immediately realized that the village was missing something important. There are no temples there! No temple and no shrine in the whole village and its surroundings! But it is not only this circumstance that makes Sarās unique among the villages of western Garhwal. Equally amazing is the fact that there are two jagars in the village, and one of them forms the basis of the old house of the Joriants! This is without parallel. Coins are pressed into the low wooden doorframe on the

26 Even now, this is not altogether uncommon. Here and there, one can see overgrown plots of land in the middle of Bangani villages, deserted because of dōś.
27 He is presently worshipped in a small area to the southwest and west of Bangani.
ground floor (as in temples and wooden poles of jagas), and when one looks into the dark room making up the ground floor (the cowshed), one can make out between patches of hay and straw the stone plate that covers the mouth of the jaga.

We were told that this jaga emerged after the death of Dalu and Jitu. Remember that the house was built by Dalu's father on a spot charged with unusual power. Thus, Saras was the focus of chieftainship. It is like an island, but a deserted one. There are not yet any temples in its vicinity; but, of all places, three gods have jointly selected the jaga and the house of the Jorians as a target of their doṣ. Jotari has turned her back not only on her parental village but also on that of her husband, the hero of a bygone world.

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